

SIMPSON PARK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 49,670 acres

The Simpson Park Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-060-428) is located in the Simpson Park Mountain Range in Lander and Eureka Counties approximately 50 miles northwest of Eureka, Nevada. The WSA includes 49,670 acres of public land and surrounds two privately owned inholdings totaling 80 acres.

Except for a short section in the north and south portion of the area, the boundary follows a 7,000-foot topographic line around the majority of the wilderness study area. The remainder of the boundary follows roads and drainages. The Simpson Park WSA consists of mountainous country with scattered stands of aspen and mountain mahogany. It is approximately 17 miles long and five miles wide.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 0 acres recommended for wilderness 49,670 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 49,670 acres for uses other than wilderness (Maps 1 & 2). All wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long-term. Although the recommendation is not the all wilderness alternative, the recommendation for this WSA would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The Simpson Park WSA was recommended for uses other than wilderness because of known barite deposits and a high potential for other minerals in the northern portion. There are three mining plans of operation on record for this area. Upon release from wilderness interim management, further exploration and the extraction of locatable minerals is expected. Because of the presence of numerous ways, private inholdings, spring developments, and unfenced private land located on the periphery of the WSA, the unit would be difficult to manage as wilderness.

The recommendation was made in consideration of the substantial number of human imprints, the known barite deposits and high mineral potential in the northern part, the private inholdings, and potential management problems with ORV use.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Simpson Park WSA consists of a portion of the Simpson Park Range, a long but narrow range that trends to the northeast. The northern and eastern portions of the WSA is covered with a desert shrub vegetation with scattered stands of pinyon juniper on the west facing slopes and scattered stands of aspen and cottonwood in the wet areas and mountain mahogany on the rocky ridges. The southern and southwestern portion of the WSA has a good cover of pinyon and juniper. The southern portion of the unit is generally free from human imprints and is in a natural state. The WSA contains a substantial number of human imprints. There are a total of 16 ways that cover a total of 18 miles inside the WSA. This has a negative affect on the wilderness character of the northern part of the area. The northern portion also contains five water developments and two 40 acre private inholdings. Shagnasty Basin was identified during the wilderness inventory as unnatural.

B. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude are limited in the northern portion but there are good opportunities for solitude in the southern portion. Sights and sounds outside the boundary of the Simpson Park WSA would have little effect on the quality of a wilderness experience within the unit. Lack of development and the remoteness of the area are the primary reasons for this. The area is long and narrow with private land protruding

into the mountain range at various places. Private land borders the unit at five places: The Gund Ranch in the northeast portion, the Indian Ranch in the southwest portion, two places at the Ackerman Ranch, and at Grubbs Canyon in the southeast portion of the unit.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The diversity of opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, and hunting contribute to an overall outstanding opportunity for recreation.

D. Special Features: No special features of geological, ecological, scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value are known to exist in the Simpson Park WSA.

4. MANAGEABILITY

It would be possible to manage the Simpson Park WSA in order to preserve its wilderness character. However, there would be some difficulties in doing so. Unfenced private inholdings of large acreage protrude into the unit at five places. Two private inholdings of forty acres each exist within the unit. There are a large number of post-FLPMA mining claims and mineral leases in the northern portion of the unit. The development potential of the area for mining is high. The large number of roads and ways associated with the unit would make it almost impossible to prevent unauthorized vehicle use. Closure of all these road and ways would not be feasible and motorized vehicle traffic would be difficult to control. Continued livestock grazing would be compatible with wilderness management.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The northern part of the Simpson Park WSA has known deposits of barite and has a high potential for mineral resources. Leasable mineral potential is low for oil and gas. The potential for geothermal is moderate with the greatest potential along the range front fault on the west side of the WSA. There are no geothermal leases but 150 mining claims and five oil and gas leases covering 8,640 acres do occur in the WSA.

It is anticipated that there would be an acceleration of exploration for geothermal, barite and precious metal resources in the future following a final wilderness decision.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 13 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Five individuals and five environmental organizations favored the Simpson Park designation, indicating naturalness, large size, and rugged and scenic as reasons for supporting this recommendation. One individual, one mining organization and one local government opposed this designation, indicating manageability, human imprints, and private inholdings as reasons for supporting this recommendation.

Reasons for supporting the all wilderness alternative were; outstanding wilderness values, minimal conflicts, most spectacular area, all the stuff of a classic wilderness. Reasons for supporting the no wilderness alternative were; key to economic mineralization in Nevada, one site in the whole state that has one of the best exposures of strata for barite deposits.

The State, during its consistency review, concurred with the Preferred Alternative.